

32 Ways to Start the Year Off Right

A little planning at the beginning of school can pay big dividends as you go through the coming school year. Getting started on the right foot can make all the difference. Here are some things to consider as you plan for the months ahead.

1. Build relationships

Be nice to the school secretaries, cafeteria workers, aides, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, and custodians. Get involved in school activities and school staff functions.

2. Give your classroom some class

Try decorating your classroom in a manner that will catch the eyes of your students and give them something to think about at the same time.

3. Introduce yourself

Try having the teachers in your building write a biographic sketch of themselves to post outside their classrooms. You never know when a student may find he or she has something in common with a teacher and is able to strike up a relationship that could be a positive learning experience.

4. Establish the rules

If you want discipline to work during the year, start off by establishing class rules right at the beginning. (They should probably number no more than five.) Let the students have a role in establishing them. If the kids feel a part of them, they will have more of a tendency to follow the rules. Rules should be written and posted in the classroom.

5. Check school policy

If you intend to teach subject matter that borders on controversy, be sure you are within board policy. Keep your personal views on religion and politics to yourself.

6. Get organized

Start off the year by getting your personal papers organized. You never know when you may have to produce a document related to your job.

7. Keep records

You may have expenditures that could be deductibles on your income tax. Now is the time to set aside a place for keeping tax records and to start keeping track of them.

8. Improve yourself

Set your sights on improving your professional ability in at least one area during the coming year. Then decide how best to go about it.

9. Set a class goal

You can develop some spirit among class members if you have a project you are working toward. Perhaps a holiday project to help a needy family, a class trip, or a class party at the end of the year. Start your planning early in the fall to build enthusiasm.

10. Build class spirit

If you teach elementary youngsters, you might try giving your class a name such as the "Bumblebees from Room Three."

11. Play the name game

One way to get everyone, including yourself, to know everyone else in the room quickly is to play the name game. The first person in row one says, "I'm John." The second person says, "That's John and I'm Mary." The third person: "That's John and Mary and I'm Susan." Continue around the room until everyone has called off everyone else's name.

12. Develop resources

Develop your own sources of information and your resource list. Know where to get help when you need it. How can you deal with the lack of instructional materials offered by the district? Keep your eyes open for free and inexpensive materials.

13. Do your best

Determine from previous experience what factors keep you from doing your job during the school year. Then figure out a way to work around them. For example: How will you work with too many students in your class? How will you deal with the wide range of student abilities? How will you deal with disruptive students?

14. Look for some hope

Give yourself a lift toward getting into a positive frame of mind by watching for something hopeful. It may be the student who comes up to you and gives you an indication he or she learned something within the first week of school. Maybe it's the child who speaks to you in the parking lot and uses your correct name!

15. Be realistic

Don't let your sincere concern for each child turn into a depressing experience through a fear of failure. You will not win the battle with every student.

16. Be prepared for special students

You may have students with special learning problems or physical handicaps. Don't expect those problems to work themselves out. Plan from the beginning how you will deal with them in the best interests of the student, yourself, and the rest of the class.

17. Think about health

Make an early determination about how you will handle students with special health problems. Do you know what to do if you have a student subject to epileptic seizures? What about administering medicine to students?

18. Don't overlook the gifted

Once you determine you have a student in your class who could be considered gifted, don't delay in making arrangements to meet his/her specific abilities.

19. Find a shoulder

Every teacher needs a colleague to turn to for special advice or simply to unburden themselves about a special classroom challenge. If you don't have a buddy, get one.

20. Get parents involved

Determine how you will involve parents in your students' education during the coming year. Is there any special way to approach parent/teacher conferences? Are there any special messages you want to send home to parents? How will you deal with parents who want to help their students learn?

21. Communicate with parents

If you teach primary grades, send a note home early informing parents that you need time to get to know pupils before you can comment on them. However, let them know that you are available and list the process and times for getting in touch with you. For other parents, you might want to introduce yourself and include your policy on homework.

22. Know your rights

Read or reread your contract so that you will know your rights.

23. Plan lessons

Develop your lessons on the basis of what you think your students need to know and then determine the best way of teaching those things.

24. Support your association

Join your local education association for the moral support of people who understand the difficulty of your job.

25. Make a good impression

Whatever else you do, give the class the impression from the beginning that you are well organized. Your students must get the feeling right off that you are prepared and know what you are doing.

26. Build an attitude

You have the opportunity from the first day forward to help your students determine whether school is drudgery or a serious undertaking that can have its fun moments as well. If you for one moment give the impression that being in class is a chore for you, that attitude will be reflected by your students.

27. Foster curiosity

Keep in mind that if you want your students to be curious; you have to set an atmosphere that encourages curiosity and doesn't stifle it.

28. Start off slowly

Go over your material slowly the first grading period so that most students can find some success while the material is not too difficult.

29. Set a positive tone

Send a positive note home with every student at some time during the year. Catch the kids being good! Let students and their parents know you care about achievement.

30. Keep the principal informed

If you plan to do anything new or unusual this year, make certain you mention it to your building principal in advance.

31. Brief your students

At the high school level particularly, let your students know early exactly what you expect of them in your course. Most students will rise to the teacher's expectations.

32. And finally

Keep these three qualities of good teaching in mind: be flexible, be patient and have a sense of humor.

This list of suggested ways to start the year off right was originally published by the [Virginia Education Association](#).